

Collette Stevenson MSP
Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

By email: SJSS.committee@parliament.scot

10 October

Dear Convener,

Pre-budget Scrutiny 2026-27

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Social Justice and Social Security Committee on 25 September. As agreed, I am writing to provide further information we discussed during the session. In addition, David Wallace will write separately on matters that fall within his operational responsibilities as Chief Executive of Social Security Scotland.

Scottish Government access to Department for Work and Pensions Data

Access to UK Government-held administrative data from many UK Government departments is vital for informed decision-making. However, it can be hindered by cultural, legislative, and technical barriers, as well as lengthy approval processes. To address this, the Office of the Chief Statistician has set up a team to directly tackle these challenges. The UK Data Sharing Team are working to streamline data sharing processes to improve access to data about Scotland, including from DWP and HMRC.

This work will help to unlock data held by UK Government departments about Scotland for the Scottish Government and its agencies to improve policy development to support the Programme for Government, including eradicating child poverty, growing our economy, tackling the climate emergency, and improving public services. The data will be able to support policies that are already committed and crucially, sustained data sharing will also allow us to evaluate their effectiveness as well.

On delivering policies, and specifically on data sharing with DWP, the recent data sharing of Children in Low Income Families (CILIF) dataset from DWP will mean that Scottish Government can more accurately allocate Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to schools and refine analysis on the poverty-related attainment gap.

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The Chief Statistician ran a workshop at the Whole Family Support event on 24 September on improving lives through harnessing data. The workshop explored, with stakeholders, potential future use cases for UK government datasets which could be used to aid whole family support. Building these cases helps to identify which datasets to target next and provides the lawful purpose necessary to use the legislation to increase the amount of data sharing using the Digital Economy Act 2017. We are working collaboratively with the UK Government to develop new uses for the public service delivery data sharing powers in the Digital Economy Act 2017.

The UK Data Sharing team have several live data sharing projects, including one related to family support. This data share would deliver HMRC, DWP Social Security Scotland Data for the Child Poverty Pathfinder Evaluation.

Social Security Scotland data is included in the Registration and Population Interaction Database (RAPID) dataset, which provides a single coherent view of interactions across the breadth of benefits and earnings datasets for anyone with a National Insurance number (NINo). This dataset is held by DWP and there are plans to include pension age disability payment, carers support payment and Scottish adult disability living allowance data in the next version.

The Office of the Chief Statistician is currently coordinating use cases to build a business case to allow Scottish Government access to RAPID for requested purposes, and ensure it is used to improve policy development, delivery and evaluation.

Support for evaluation and the evidence base

This year we are progressing a number of evaluations under the two existing evaluation strategies, with the evaluation of the Five Family Payments published in September.

We are also developing a framework for the next phase of evaluating the impact of the devolved social security benefits. Utilising evidence from our previous evaluations, this framework will look across benefits and employ the use of new data sources/methods to enable us to look at longer term as well as short- and medium-term cross-cutting impacts, such as take-up, trust in public services, and poverty and deprivation.

We will utilise data from a range of sources (e.g. management data, population survey data, and small-scale qualitative research studies) and triangulate this with a new annual client survey which is currently being scoped. The survey will focus on the impacts of the benefits specifically and allow us to look at differences across groups of interest.

Population Health Framework

As you will be aware, the Scottish Government, and COSLA co-published [Scotland's Population Health Framework](#) in June of this year in partnership with Public Health Scotland, and Scottish Directors of Public Health. The Framework sets out a long-term, cross-government and cross-sector approach to improving health and reducing inequalities over the next decade, with a dual aim: to improve overall life expectancy in Scotland and to narrow the life expectancy gap between the most deprived 20% of local areas and the national average by 2035.

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The evidence is clear that health is closely linked to the circumstances and environments in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and age - commonly referred to as the wider determinants, or 'building blocks', of health. The Framework identifies five interconnected drivers of prevention in health and wellbeing: prevention-focused systems; social and economic factors; places and communities; enabling healthy living; and equitable access to health and care. It seeks to complement and build upon ongoing and planned action, recognising the need to address structural barriers that limit access to services and support, and targeting action to those most in need. This includes complementing existing policies, such as the [*Best Start, Bright Futures*](#), the second Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

Adopting a preventative approach is central to tackling persistent disparities in health outcomes and life expectancy across Scotland, and embedding prevention in our systems is one of the Framework's priorities. To achieve this, our approach will include improving the prioritisation of prevention and addressing inequalities in planning, developing resource allocation tools that give stronger weighting to prevention—initially focusing on health and social care budgets—strengthening governance models for health and social care reform aligned with the wider National Performance Framework, and exemplifying the core behaviours of the Place Principle by working with partners and local communities to improve lives and create better places.

I trust that this information will be of assistance in your considerations, and I look forward to our continuing work together and investment in social security to deliver for the people of Scotland.

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

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